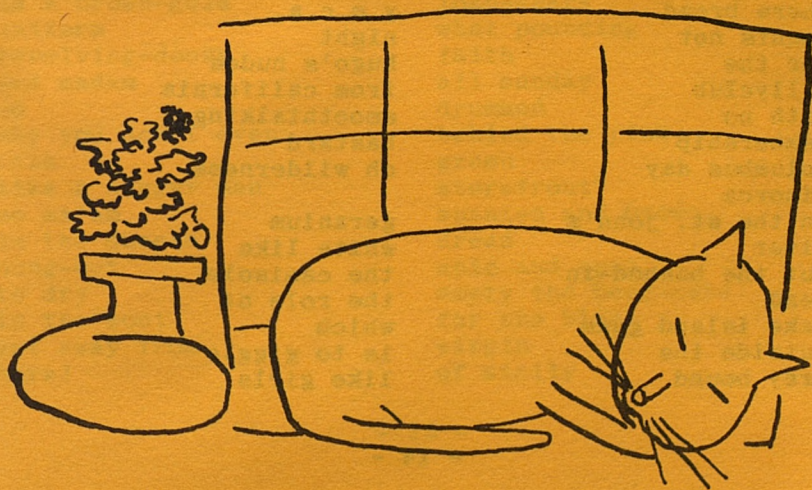


GERANIUM

BY

CHRISTOPHER PERRET

christa malone



GERANIUM

-- for Tom Lipps,
a peaceful man

geranium
red like
you
buffy
sainte-marie
excuse me
for
plucking you
from the sea
like this
freedom
now
winding its
way
through factories
blood red
rivers
later
land of the
cacique
and the shorter
seminole
the wasp-like
oriole
america
in the everglades
for the striking
lightening-bolt
where bread
counts not
for the
billyclub
with no
membership
columbus day
minorca
on the st. john's
river
but the bashed-in
head
wake island guam
outside the
grey hound

bus-station door
glass lights
in washington
d. c.
2 am boy
boy-man fourteen
wide-eyed
asleep
afraid
pout-faced
tears in my
heart
clenched boy-man
fist
the victory farm
camp
left behind
across the wide
chesapeake bay
and long slim
busses
bursting slow-
motion
into the truck-
farm
flat-cars
blood
blood on the
highway
and the broken
whiskey bottle
in a man's
hip-pocket
black
y.m.c.a.
night
hugo's nudes
from california
smoothtalking
bastard
oh wilderness

geranium
white like
the camisole
the role of
which
is to giggle
like girls

over footprints
of muddy
knowledge
dragging chains
through backyard
knifings
deep into death
why weep?
why ask questions?
why answer
hands lifting clean
lifting clean linen
from the pile?
mrs. murphy's
tuesday laundry
moral of drunken
judgements
silencing the grave
with a hurtling
brick
through the gravel
missed!
raising new sites
of glass-eyed
buildings
deaf to the
cries of
of the street
below
blind to the
lies
stripped bare
the aspidistra
old man
in a brown-gold
uniform
revolving-doors
yes madam
no
why you don't even
talk
like a nigger man
no ma'am
in the sheets
hung-out
to dry
in the soot
get away from
here!

this is a
respectable
death
to the children
rickety with
catalepsis
six-stories down
into the
neighborhood
limbo
yes sir
cock-roaches scum
red communism
no
I was in the
navy
grey-skinned and
naked
summertime
skip
st. patrick's
day
and the schools
of bloated
carp
up-river
east to the
hudson
scavengers uptown
to the zionist
coalyards
up the harlem
river
on the back of a
loan-shark
what pounding
faith
all sunday
drummed
behind the pink-
green
storefront?
spanish and brown
dread
spic and span
empty the beer-cans
for the black
virgin
of sicily

guineas and fig-
trees
for all yesterdays
back home
back home
back home
never more to naples
angelo
the clanking of
cranes
and liberty
cracked
flibbertigibbet
of ~~roses~~ downtown
with a shoulder
full of furs
into thumbnails
doughnuts
into swallowtails
nedicks
into
plastic pails
and fists
of beaten flounder
barking in the
fulton fish market
its unleavened
promise
from the bunds
of new jersey
through the
holland tunnel
of brother
forever
uphill
push the stone
syphilis
by the sweat
of your foreskin
and breath
of the tonsure
and bursting
of the illuminated
manuscripts
of the cloisters
of your schnabel
and brow
geranium

pink like
sunset
of the congo
flying into
winter
on the balsa wood
wings
of the shoeless
dervish
blackfoot and
stork
and the plastic
bomb
and you
flamingo
graceful bird
all rainbow
and turning from
bayou
wreck of the oil-
rig barge
banana
magnolia
into my only
yesterday
thank you for
nights
without moon
on the knifeblades
of decatur street
past the
french market
I have wandered
through
eugene o'neil
into chinese lanterns
of illusion and
spice
my norwegian bourbon
street wife
yellow-haired
slanteyed of
lapland
my forgotten victrola
soft-hipped
sounds of afro-cuba
songs of the yoruba
waiting on tables
on the gulf

yawning
from honduras
by the light
of spanish fly
in the shuffling
slipper-floors
of the mexican
tacos enchiladas
between draughts
from the candlelight
taps of the
brothers laffite
I wandered
through
cajun
and the cotton-carrying
railroads
of the middle-south
from federal warehouse
to fire
by the tank-town
station tin-roofed
shacks
in the dusty sun
of noon
I wandered

geranium
streaked with red
like anarchy
black
with blood
congealed

geranium of the tatra
red
and white
and pink
in the green windowbox
of the whitewashed house

geranium cut into
carnival ribbons
geranium conga
geranium samba
geranium specking the
sky
over water
black with fires

golden with the pipe-like
barracuda
tin-like with the steel-
band oil drum
geranium still with the
knowledge of death
inextricable
oh water
oh earth and sky
oh fire on the mountains
of the romero

geranium
red white pink
like silver
hair
plucked on
banjos
of catgut love
tucked round the
corpses
of the old
women
widows who have died
unshaved
unashamed
their children given
to the millstone
and the bayonet
for chewing-tobacco
spat into the
open wound
festered from the
centuries
of deprivation
on land and on sea
free-man and slave
to coffee
and gold
diamond
and sugar-cane
drunk from the
shoots
to the god of the
dried twig
and strangling
grass
bread from the indian
corn

molasses from
skin
black as the thief's
heart burnt
on a spit
on the roasting fire
oh lord
hanging from a tree
like me
blown by the wind
of the caribees
breeding the pollen
of a soul
sewn on armbands
crossed-arms
cross of lorraine
lions full-grown
crucified
in lybia
on a hill
against the sunset
salambo
as an ugly threat
their tawny manes
blowing on the wind
of calvary
stitched into
medals
virgin mary
made of felt
oh sacred heart
kyrie eleison
for the curled-up
shoes
one
following another
around the world
humphry bogart
circle of
plenty
and a fathomless
heart
joseph conrad
korzeniowski
but when? and where?
the iron sea
the eyes upturned
of the darkskinned
pilgrim

oh where? and when?
for the many
expendable
has it changed?
since the beginning?
this multitude of
sins
unrequited
is there justice
for the many
can the few ever
know
what veil blackens
their eyes
layer upon layer
millenium upon
millenium
from the bright
colors
of a heaven without
name
or religion
or selection
or precondition
or place
or time
whether here and
now
or elsewhere
behind another mountain
of another life
in another skin
of another mortal
thing?
forever
loincloth
message
misunderstood
purged
always in the blood
of a man
once god
love always
pride of the
christian
an ugly curse
mahatma
peace
had cupped

for the handful of
rice
mahatma
jesus of galilee
gave birth to the
heathen kiss
money
money
money
for the giver in
purgatory
who owns the life
and soul
of the receiver
cracked
on its cradle of
straw
for the ass to
champ
for the ox to
trample into
a wilderness of
untended fields
the men have gone
to war
oh lord
the women are left
to weep
for memory pressed
between the pages
of a book
lying on a table
by the cold cold
bed
of the missing
achilles
ulysses
smoking potato leaves
in the trenches
stinking of lucre
in the rising stock
of the exchange
at least one life
times all
those punctured
helmets
away
rolling back with
the changing

seasons
over the hill's
roundabout
of yesterdays
I lose my footing
on the scaffoldings of
tomorrow
loosed like a
ravenous
wolf
into the shopkeeper's
schoolboy's
conscript's
everyday
oh yes
I remember you
and you
and the dust collected
on my feet
and the leaf grown from
my hand
and the flower which was
my face
and the freedom so
naturally
burst from my soul
one day
not long ago
when whipped
I sat dry-eyed
in herod's cellars
and watched the
rat
scratching for grain
among the chaff
between the flags
of the dungeon
floor
martin luther
king
walks through the
streets
the blackfaced
minstrels
as roman soldiers
play dice
waiting their turn
caddies at the
country club

for dead solicitors
bankers
bishops
and generals
the green is soft
with its eighteen
holes
and the pastures
green
stand beyond the pale
and doff their hats
and grin
with not unhappy
ignorance
of milk and honey
which flows across
the jordan
for all who know
and can believe
in songs of plenty
for all
who toil
and sleep their
toil.
in dreams of
soil
grown ripe with
happiness
for all
filling the bucket
with spools of
tears
wrung from quenched
fears
for what is done
cannot be
undone
by added cares
of the old
and the young

geranium
blue like
unabashed gloom
lizards
a moment
in the sun
mosquitoes thriving
in the stagnant

water
of a broken
jar
and schools of
phantoms
screaming a thousand
languages
of angry longing
for armies of
naked women
bearing arms
spiked from their
wombs
feeding the monster
from a hacked-off
breast
and herring
waiting for wars
patiently
in tins
so that the seas
will be theirs again
and pilchards
mackerel
and cod
feeling much the
same
awaiting the end
of the day
when sunsets are
gay and rhymed
once more
through the window-
panes
glittering
on the empty plates
and the steaming
tureens
of soup green
with large turtles
speared
from the ocean's
mouth
washing certain islands
off the coast of
chile
where a one-legged
weather-man
dies all alone

by a busted
transmitter
an ax stuck in the
wall
holding an empty
gin bottle
and stroking the
half-wild
cat
murmuring
to the fathers chewed
by machines
and yet unborn
to the trodden generations
pickled and sliced
to their unborn
sons
in the jewish graves
burned on the hindu
pyres
unmarked
in the christian
plots
dizzy with crosses
so many
marking unknown borders
through the wild grass
of
when-will-it-end
flapping the air
with the leather wings
of flattened wind-
mills
oh knight sad night
oh proverbose squire
smiling
your bygone messages
of a wisdom
unheeded
in the parking-lots
of caracas
in the magnificent
architectural wonders
of brasilia
in the spring-flowered
ocean of the
ukraine
in the gutted churches
of the marne

in the sweat-shops
of chicago
in the catacombs of
new york
through the graveyard
cities
of old india
through the blueclad
farmlands
of new china
through your own
bonelike
la mancha
clicking round the wheel
of the casinos
lapping the hulls
of sleeping yachts
empty with the frenetic
day
dull with the lapwing
nights
of picadilly
times square
via veneto
and place pigalle
die!
die!
die!
is the cry
for tomorrow there is
danger
you may live
in the mountain
and on the sea
and caught up in the
opening sky

geranium
golden like
the sun
why don't you
blush
with the thorn
pricking
your breast
motive is crazy
like
the locomotive
but steam will bust

the lid
like a gigantic
roman-candle
from the heady brew
and all will spill
oh world
and all will spill

November 27, 1965

-- Christopher Perret

Deya, Mallorca

3 dec 67

... With this note you'll find a copy of Christopher's poem G E R A N I U M.... As you can see from the date of composition, it is one of the last things CP wrote and very probably his last long poem.... Chris had for sometime been experimenting with short line forms (so had I and we discussed it off and on) that would follow the breaks and pauses of the declaiming voice. And he had been feeling his way towards a deeper larger human statement (which unfortunately turned out to be a final utterance!). I feel that this integration of new form and new voice takes place in G E R A N I U M. He would no doubt have done some revising (he always did), if only that natural period of waiting that confirms that there's nothing to change -- but we'll never know now what changes he might have made.... Life like death is no respecter of persons!

Tom Lipps (of the dedication), who was very close to Chris the last weeks of his life and was the first person to whom the poem was shown and read, made copies of it, shortly after Christopher's death, in Mati's house on that Deya cliff on Christopher's own typewriter. My last contact with Tom was about a year ago. He has since completely disappeared -- a very Lipps thing to do! He had given me a copy and I showed it to the Poésie Vivante people when I saw them in Paris. They were very enthusiastic and wanted to include it in the